

“The two-state solution is just empty talk to not have to do anything”

Ahmed Abu Arteman and Ofra Yeshua-Lyth

He is Palestinian, she is Israeli, and independently of each other they are advocating one Israeli-Palestinian state. What do they think of Trump’s “peace plan”?

Floris van Straaten, 31 January 2020

In the Middle East “peace plan”, which Trump presented with much bravado in the presence of Israeli president Netanyahu, but in absence of any Palestinian representatives, there is merely a very modest piece of land reserved for the Palestinians. Pretty much everyone agrees that the patchwork quilt they are left with is barely viable. The two-state solution – an Israeli state alongside a fully-fledged Palestinian state – which European diplomacy still strives for, among others, is ebbing away more and more.

That is the only silver lining that Ahmed Abu Artema (35) and the former Israeli journalist Ofra Yeshua-Lyth (69) see in the plan. Both of them have been advocating the establishment of one common state independently of each other, and recently visited the Netherlands for this cause.

“The plan provides clarity. The reality is that Trump does not see the Palestinians and does not care about their rights. He ignores the Palestinians’ suffering entirely. Israel has never demonstrated that it would accept a sovereign state either. The two-state solution is simply outdated”, says Artema. He is known as one of the initiators of Gaza’s “Great March of Return” of Palestinian refugees to Israel in 2018. Many dozens of unarmed Palestinian protestors were killed by the Israeli army near the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Why are you advocating a one-state solution?

Artema: “It is a question of, after seventy years, ending the suffering of the Palestinian people and at the same time finding a realistic solution. I believe this would be the case in one common state with equal rights for all citizens.”

But why would Israel accept that too?

Yeshua: “We see it as a win-win situation, even though that is still a taboo in Israel and, in fact, in Europe as well. I think the whole idea of a Jewish state, based on religion, is wrong. It merely serves as an instrument to control others and to take their rights. In the long run this is unsustainable. That is why I favour a secular, democratic state with equal rights for all citizens. I would, by the way, just as much oppose an Islamic state.”

Many Israelis claim that they are afraid to live in a state in which Palestinians are, numerically, in the majority?

Artema: “Currently the Jews in Israel are the majority indeed, but this demographic balance goes at the expense of the Palestinians. And that should not be normal. There are millions of Palestinian refugees. Why should we only be sensitive to the Israeli concerns? If all citizens really have equal rights, the demographic balance should not be an issue. South Africa is a good example. After apartheid, the blacks did not toss the whites into the ocean either. What they did do was change the system.”

Yeshua: “The Jews were used to living as a minority, in many different countries. Today most of them have different ideas. But to consider everyone as a threat, just for having different parents, is a wrong approach. The people in Israel have been brainwashed into believing that you will eradicate

the Jews by taking their majority. But Jews can perfectly live as a minority in a secular and democratic state.”

Do you see any chance for a realization of this one-state solution at this point?

Yeshua: “Research shows that about 30 to 40 per cent of the Palestinians and about 20 per cent of the Israelis are open to the idea. But it is still a lost cause for the time being. For example, I could not even run for parliament without committing to the Jewish state. That is something all members of parliament are obliged to.”

Artema: “All Israeli officials speak of one state, but by that they mean a Jewish state. Israel does have the power but it lacks the moral legitimacy, and the Palestinians will never give up their rights. Palestinian officials on the other hand speak of a two-state solution. This, however, has become an illusion and the reality is that we are heading towards one state, even though that is currently a state with some kind of an apartheid regime. That is why our only choice is to fight the current regime of discrimination and to strive for equal rights in one common state.”

Why do you think that the European states are the ones to hold on to the two-state solution?

Yeshua: “That is what we keep asking them. It is just empty talk. The idea of an independent Palestinian state has never been more than an excuse to not really have to do anything, and likely also to stay friends with the Israeli government.”